

R 130251Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY MBABANE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3462
INFO SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

UNCLAS MBABANE 000067

AF/S (MHARRIS); OGAC (CHOLMES;JTIMBERLAKE)
PRETORIA PLEASE PASS TO USAID

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [EAID](#) [WZ](#)

SUBJECT: FRUITFUL DIALOGUE BETWEEN AMBASSADOR AND PM

1. SUMMARY: On March 6, Ambassador Parker met with Swazi Prime Minister (PM) Barnabus Sibusiso Dlamini. Discussion included: Ambassador Parker's impending departure from Swaziland; the 2008 Human Rights Report; current international perspective towards the government of the Kingdom of Swaziland (GKOS); Swaziland's failure to fund universal primary education; corruption; accelerating discussions on the PEPFAR Partnership Framework; and the renegotiation of the chancery lease with the Central Bank of Swaziland. Most encouraging, PM Dlamini stressed that he wants the Partnership Framework policy discussions that include the Ambassador, himself, the Ministry of Health, and National Emergency Response on HIV/AIDS (NERCHA) to be completed by March 13. The PM also stated he would speak to the Governor of the Central Bank to ensure that the chancery space is secure in the near term.

2. On March 6, Ambassador Parker met with PM Dlamini. The PM expressed his regret regarding Ambassador Parker's early departure from Swaziland. The Ambassador informed him that he was departing for personal reasons, and also regretted having to depart at a highly productive moment in U.S.-Swazi relations.

3. The PM stated that, although it has been his desire to have monthly meetings, he decided it would be prudent to wait for media coverage to subside to avoid a meeting being misinterpreted by the press as a confrontation. (NOTE: In January at a Public Diplomacy event, Ambassador Parker publicly encouraged Swaziland to suspend its repressive enforcement of the Suppression of Terrorism Act and to respect the freedoms of expression, press and public assembly guaranteed in the constitution.) Ambassador Parker expressed that his comments were sincere, but the media reaction was unexpected. The Ambassador said that the GKOS' continued use of the Suppression of Terrorism Act to threaten members of civil society and now the Swazi civil service, combined with the failure of the GKOS to implement universal primary education this year, is casting a negative image of him, and that of the GKOS, internationally. The Ambassador used that opportunity to present PM Dlamini with a copy of the Swaziland chapter of the 2008 Human Rights Report, noting that multilateral organizations and NGOs have provided input to the document and it reflects the current view of the USG towards the GKOS' position on human rights. He explained that the combination of constitutional violations by the government adds to a negative image. The PM stated that it is good to know how others view Swaziland. Regarding the Human Rights Report, the PM stated that he would read it and decide whether or not the GKOS would respond.

MARIO MASUKU

4. The Ambassador stressed the concern of multilateral organizations, bilateral Ambassadors, Amnesty International, and other NGOs over the continued imprisonment of opposition leader Mario Masuku on sedition and support of terrorism charges, and the increasingly negative impression of the GKOS with these organizations. PM Dlamini repeated his previous position that Mr. Masuku is in prison because he prefers standing on principal, rather than gaining his freedom. He said that Mr. Masuku's bail is only 500 Rand (approximately 50 U.S. dollars) and Masuku could pay this small fee at any time. The PM looked annoyed at the suggestion that Mr. Masuku be released on his own recognizance and responded by stating that Mr. Masuku will stand trial in the current session of the high court.

UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

15. Ambassador Parker asked the PM about the government's ability to pay the school fees for Ambassador's Girls Scholarship Program (AGSP) recipients, because program funding is scheduled to end in June 2009. He noted that the AGSP was a four-year program with an ending date that would coincide with the constitution's promise of universal education for all primary school children in 2009. The Prime Minister noted that the Swazi budget shortfalls did not permit funding of universal education or the AGSP in 2009. He said the provision is misunderstood, stating the constitution calls for (or permits) a phase-in of universal primary education, starting at the first grade level and adding another grade each successive year. The planned roll-out of the program will only benefit those children who have not yet entered primary school, and will only cover tuition. Parents will still be responsible for uniforms, books and supplies.

16. The Ambassador informed the PM that a UNDP study of the costs associated with universal education in Swaziland indicated that implementation would cost the GKOS an additional 11.5 million U.S. Dollars per year. He said that Swaziland's failure to fund universal education appears to be a matter of preference, rather than funding limitations. He further noted that the 2009 budget for the GKOS has allocated \$14 million USD for cost overruns for the Mbabane bypass road and other more expensive, yet less critical, projects. The PM stated that the cost overrun for the bypass road is the result of corruption among private contractors. He said that the GKOS was going to use the Anti-Corruption Commission to ferret out corruption and would start with the Central Transit Authority (CT) and its private contractors. He stated that the Embassy will be hearing about the first indictments by Swaziland for GKOS employees.

PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK ON HIV/AIDS

17. Prime Minister Dlamini said that in addition to vigorously pursuing perpetrators of corruption, the GKOS was also committed to combating HIV/AIDS in Swaziland. He complained that the USG and other donors were not committing the level of funds to Swaziland that were being given to countries with a lesser prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS. The Ambassador reminded him of the increased funding by PEPFAR and mentioned our efforts to develop a Partnership Framework with Swaziland prior to the end of April. The PM stated that he would speak to Minister of Health Benedict Xaba and said that all Swazi and American negotiators should meet in his office on Thursday, March 12 to discuss the final details of the Framework. That meeting has been scheduled.

LEASE ON EMBASSY CHANCERY

18. Before ending the meeting, the Ambassador told the Prime Minister that he was concerned about the status of the lease on the Embassy chancery. He informed him the PM that the U.S. Government has been involved in ongoing discussions regarding the terms of our lease since 2007. He assured the PM that the USG is making a good faith effort to move the lease agreement along, that we have identified property for construction of a new chancery in Ezulwini, but did not mention the recently delayed construction date from 2011 to 2017. The PM assured the Ambassador that the GKOS would not evict the Embassy from its current facilities in the near term and that he would inform Governor Martin Dlamini of the Central Bank to be more patient with the U.S. Embassy. On the other hand, he recommended that we continue to seek ways to reach agreement on the terms of a new lease with the Central Bank. The Ambassador stated that he would make a request to OBO to send real estate negotiators to visit Swaziland to conclude contract talks ASAP.

COMMENT

19. Despite the range of contentious issues covered, the tone of the conversation was relaxed, congenial and professional. The Prime Minister thanked the Ambassador for coming to see him on short notice and stated that he hopes to continue this series of one-on-one meetings on a monthly basis. The Ambassador informed him of his desire to have a private meeting with the Swazi National Council (the King's secretive advisory board) and invite the King to his residence for a private dinner. The PM encouraged him to do both and stated that he would advise the Council and His Majesty to accept the invitations from the U.S. Embassy.

